

Finding of No Significant Impact

County K Landing Rehabilitation Project

Saint Croix National Scenic Riverway, Wisconsin

October 13, 2004

Background

St. Croix National Scenic Riverway, which includes the St. Croix and Namekagon rivers, was established as one of the original eight rivers under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in 1968. The Riverway is significant because it is one of the last undisturbed, large floodplain rivers in the upper Mississippi River system, and also because it contains an unrivaled combination of exceptional natural resources and scenic, aesthetic, cultural, and recreational values.

Nearly 50 landings are used access points for fishing, boating, camping and other activities. County K Landing is one of the most heavily used landings on the Namekagon River. The small congested and unorganized dirt parking lot creates safety hazards and environmental degradation with runoff directly entering the river here. This project will replace the current parking area with a larger parking area designed to reduce congestion and runoff to the river, thus reducing impacts to scenery, natural resources and visitor enjoyment, while reducing safety concerns, increasing accessibility and increasing visitor enjoyment.

Riverway staff have conducted an environmental assessment (EA) that provides an analysis of the environmental consequences of siting and construction of a new parking area, visitor facilities, and river access facilities at County K Landing for the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. Internal scoping addressed issues and possible facilities design. Public input was sought before and after the draft environmental assessment was written. Concerns identified during scoping and evaluated in the environmental assessment included staging area/canoe launch, water access for fire use, parking area size and location, highway access location, restroom facility location, day use/picnic area, wetlands, drainage/erosion and pollutants from runoff, natural resources, cultural resources, ethnographic resources, accessibility and traffic flow/visitor safety.

Preferred Alternative

The Preferred Alternative is described in detail in the EA. This alternative will replace the current parking area with a staging loop for the canoe launch. A new looped parking area will be located just west and west-northwest of the current parking area. This parking area will accommodate approximately 29 cars and will also have 6 pull through spaces for vehicles with trailers. The existing stream crossing to the vault toilets will be widened with fill and a longer culvert to gain access to the new parking area. The access from County Highway K will be replaced approximately 130 feet south of the current access. A new bulletin board will be installed near the canoe launch. Other facilities will remain the same as currently located. Project implementation will occur outside the busy summer season to limit impacts to visitors.

All soils disturbed or exposed will be planted with native vegetation where feasible. Disturbance of soils and native vegetation will be avoided where possible. Removed topsoil will be stockpiled and covered on site to be reused in areas that are disturbed or where previously impacted soils (former parking area and highway access) are rehabilitated. Native trees, shrubs and other plants will be planted as a screen along the river and between the parking area and County Highway K. The amount of natural screening of the facilities from the river will be increased through implementation of this project.

Archeological surveys revealed no evidence of sites indicating former use of the area by Native Americans. Area topography also suggests that former use is unlikely.

The Preferred Alternative is also the environmentally preferred alternative when measured against the six criteria listed in Section 101 of NEPA.

Criterion 1 (Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations) is best met by the Preferred Alternative which emphasizes:

- A better, more sustainable facility.
- Minimal disturbance of new areas with relatively undisturbed ecological communities.
- An increase in native plant screening along the river.
- A reduction of impacts to water quality.

Criterion 2 (Assure for all generations safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings) is best met by the Preferred Alternative which emphasizes:

- A reduction of pollutants and sediments into the river.
- Construction of aesthetically pleasing parking and launching facilities for visitors.
- Full accessibility to the new facilities and access to the river.
- Improved safety for visitors.

Criterion 3 (Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk of health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences) is best met by the Preferred Alternative, which emphasizes:

- Improved parking facilities.
- Improved safety for visitors

Criterion 4 (Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment that supports diversity and variety of individual choice) is best met by the Preferred Alternative which emphasizes:

- Preservation and improvement to the scenic view as seen from the highway and the river.
- Parking for a variety of vehicles.
- Minimal impacts upon native vegetation and natural communities by constructing in existing disturbed areas where possible and minimizing disturbance to undisturbed areas.
- Restoration of part of the shoreline at the site of the existing landing.
- Improved accessibility through designation of handicap parking spaces.

Criterion 5 (Achieve a balance between population and resource use that will permit high standards of living and wide sharing of life's amenities) is best met by the Preferred Alternative which emphasizes:

Providing parking at a level that does not promote overuse of the river.

Providing a high standard of living through improved facilities.

Criterion 6 (Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources) is best met by the Preferred Alternative which emphasizes:

Improved water quality.

Use of recycled materials to the extent that is practicable.

Other Alternatives Considered

Five other alternatives, including the No-Action Alternative were also examined in the EA. These alternatives included:

No Action Alternative – leaves existing facilities in place. Significant safety concerns would remain and runoff would continue unabated into the Namekagon River.

Alternative 1 – similar to the preferred alternative, but with two new parking lots and continued use of the existing highway access. Traffic flow would conflict with pedestrian traffic from the main parking area creating less safe conditions than the Preferred Alternative. Use of the old highway access was considered less safe due to visibility and proximity to the bridge.

Alternative 2 – similar to the preferred alternative but has a new highway access located even farther away from the bridge on an old road bed. This alternative would require relocating the vault toilet. Toilets and parking facilities would be closer to the highway, impacting visitor experience.

Alternative 3 – similar to the preferred alternative, but with two new parking lots and a new highway access farther removed from the bridge on an old road bed. This alternative would require significant fill in a wetland as part of the traffic loop.

Alternative 4 – leaves existing facilities in place but paves the existing parking area and would designate parking areas. Though an improvement over the No Action Alternative, the significant safety concerns due to poor traffic flow and insufficient parking would remain.

Why The Preferred Alternative Will Not Have A Significant Effect On The Human Environment

The intensity or severity of impacts resulting from implementation of the Preferred Alternative are evaluated using the ten (10) criteria listed in 40 CFR 1508.27. Key areas in which impacts were evaluated included: soils, air quality, noise, traffic, surface water quality, wetlands, vegetation, wildlife, recreation and visitor use (including safety), and scenic resources. As defined in 40 CFR §1508.27, significance is determined by examining the following criteria:

Criterion 1: Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial.

The Preferred Alternative would result in some permanent minor and moderate beneficial impacts to scenic and natural resources as well as visitor experience and safety. However, the Preferred Alternative would not have a significant impact on the environmental, scenic, cultural, or recreational resources of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

The Preferred Alternative would result in some permanent, moderate impacts to certain resource areas as discussed below under other individual criteria.

Criterion 2: The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.

The Preferred Alternative would improve public safety and health for both NPS staff and visitors by reducing the need to park on the shoulders of a busy county highway. Additionally, improved traffic flow within the parking area and a new highway access to the area will result in less congestion entering and exiting the area along with better visibility. An accessible trail to the landing from the parking area will provide safe access to the river by physically challenged visitors. The new facilities will be constructed to be accessible as defined by the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968.

Criterion 3: Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

The preferred alternative will have a permanent minor to negligible impact at a minor stream crossing. The project is located partially in a floodplain but does not impact its ecological function. No state or federally listed plants or animals have been found on the site. State and federally threatened bald eagles nest along the Namekagon River with the nearest nest located 4 miles downstream of the site and are thus not expected to be impacted by this project. No evidence of an archeological site was found to exist at the site. There is a potential short-term minor impact to water quality during construction. However, this project is expected to result in a long term minor beneficial impact to water quality.

Criterion 4: The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

The Preferred Alternative is not highly controversial as evidenced from public input and agency coordination throughout the environmental assessment development process. Two comments were received from the public during the 30-day review period, including a request to keep access to water available for fire use. This project will not prevent that use. The second comment primarily solicited further information and clarification.

Criterion 5: *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

A storm event could have a minor impact to water quality due to erosion during maximum soil disturbance and exposure but even this is expected to be limited. Best management practices should limit this uncertainty and potential impacts.

Criterion 6: *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

The Preferred Alternative does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects since the alternative improves existing facilities while reducing impacts to a Wild and Scenic River at an already disturbed site. Furthermore, this level of development at this site is well within the guidelines set by the park's General Management Plan for this stretch of river.

Criterion 7: *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.*

Numerous access points to the St. Croix and Namekagon rivers exist throughout the Riverway. The level of development described by the Preferred Alternative is lower than the level of development suggested as appropriate in the General Management Plan at this location. This plan was designed to protect the Riverway from both individual and cumulative impacts to the Riverway. Likely future actions taken individually or collectively under the General Management Plan as currently written would not have a significant cumulative impact.

Criterion 8: *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

There are no known historical or archeological resources at this site. Park staff consulted with the Wisconsin State Historical Preservation Office (SHPO) for fulfillment of section 106 of NHPA. The SHPO concurred in writing on October 1, 2004 that no historical or archeological resources are located at this site. Therefore, the Preferred Alternative is not expected to have any impacts to historical or archeological resources.

Criterion 9: *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.*

There are no known state or federally listed plant species at this site. There are no expected impacts to state or federally threatened animals (bald eagles or gray wolves) known to visit this area. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Endangered Species Office in New Franken, Wisconsin, reviewed the draft environmental assessment and concurred by letter on August 30, 2004 " ...that a finding of no significant impact associated with the project would be justified."

Criterion 10: Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

The Preferred Alternative would not violate any environmental protection law or regulation. Appropriate consultation, coordination, and permitting actions would be necessary prior to implementing the Preferred Alternative. These actions include Section 106 consultation under the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 404 and 401 permits under the Clean Water Act, Section 10 permit under the Rivers and Harbors Act, and Wisconsin Administrative Code 500 addressing solid waste management requirements.

Public Involvement

Public comments were solicited as part of the scoping for this project. The draft environmental assessment was made available for public review and comment during a 30-day period ending July 5, 2004. This draft environmental assessment was available at Riverway visitor centers, on the Riverway website, and copies were mailed to those involved in consultation and all participants in the external scoping process.

Mitigation

Mitigative measures have been integrated into the project, and will be implemented as part of the project. These mandatory provisions are detailed in the table attached to this document. The NPS will ensure that these measures are accomplished; as necessary, mitigation measures will be included within appropriate contracting documents prepared in association with the project.

Finding of No Significant Impact and No Impairment

Based on my review of the facts and analysis contained in this environmental assessment, which is incorporated herein, I conclude that the Preferred Alternative for the County K Landing Rehabilitation Project at St. Croix National Scenic Riverway would not have a significant impact either by itself or considering cumulative impacts. Accordingly, the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, regulations promulgated by the President's Council on Environmental Quality, and provisions of National Park Service (NPS) Director's Order-12 and Handbook (Conservation Planning and Environmental Impact Analysis and Decision-Making) have been fulfilled. Furthermore, the Preferred Alternative selected for implementation would not impair park resources or values and would not violate the NPS Organic Act. The Preferred Alternative supports the enabling legislation establishing the upper portion of the St Croix River and its major tributary the Namekagon River as wild and scenic rivers under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 (Public Law 90-542) with the intended purpose of preserving the scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, and other values associated with free-flowing rivers and their immediate environments for future generations. An environmental impact statement is not required and will not be prepared for implementation of the Preferred Alternative.

Recommended:

Superintendent

Date

Approved:

Midwest Regional Director

Date

MITIGATIVE ACTIONS

RESOURCE OR ISSUE AREA	MITIGATION
Geology and soils	Site-specific best management practices (BMPs) will be used. These BMPs will possibly include but not be limited to reducing soil disturbance to the maximum extent possible; using silt curtains, straw bales, and temporary detention ponds; and using fast-growing grasses or other vegetation to cover temporarily stockpiled soil. Monitoring and maintenance of all erosion control devices would occur throughout the duration of the proposed project.
Surface water quality and wetlands	Short-term impacts on surface water and wetlands adjacent to any construction activity will be mitigated as indicated above for geology and soils. Long-term impacts on surface water quality and adjacent wetlands will be mitigated through maximum micromanagement of storm water runoff from new facilities. Low-impact development methods that attempt to mimic predevelopment site hydrology will be employed to store, infiltrate, evaporate and detain storm water runoff to the maximum extent possible. Vegetated buffers will be maintained adjacent to all surface waters except at the canoe access. Overland sheet flow through grassy swales or, preferably through natural vegetative cover will be maximized in siting and design. Techniques to minimize impervious surfaces will be employed in the design of all new facilities including parking lots and roadways. These techniques include, but are not limited to the use of pervious pavement in parking spaces, and installation of bioretention cells to trap parking lot and rooftop runoff.